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BARRON'S Online**When Spam Is Served,
The E-Mails Just Sizzle**By THOMAS PETZINGER JR.
November 2, 1996

I have previously written about junk mail, and I have written about telemarketing. Both of those columns aroused strong feelings -- but the latest Front Lines column, on junk e-mail, has really inflamed the passions.

Most Internet users loathe junk e-mail -- "spam," is their lovely term of art. They hate it so much that several readers contacted me to find out how to locate the software to send "mail bombs" to the spammers, even though my column specifically deplored the use of such measures.

I also heard from people who categorically support a government crackdown on spam, just like the new law banning junk faxes. A few souls wrote me to say that there's really nothing wrong with spam at all.

And just for the record, in the midst of reading and answering my mail, I received spam from an outfit in Pasadena offering get-rich-quick advice for \$20. Of course, the company did not have a listed phone number.

In any case, please tap into the debate below -- and as always, feel free to share your further thoughts with an e-mail -- no spam, please -- to TPetzinger@aol.com.

Subj: Response to the Wall St. Journal

Date: 96-11-01 12:29:37 EST

From: Action E@aol.com

Marketing a product through e-mail is not necessarily a bad thing. Both my existing customers and potential new business appreciate the e-mail that they receive from me. An on-line marketer should try to e-mail birthday messages and season's greetings messages rather than bombard strangers with crap they will almost never read. My marketing e-mail stands out because it is so personalized. Granted, I will not see the immediate results a spammer would. But I am now starting to see greater communications with my constituency, and an on-line reputation that is and will remain unscathed.

Edmund Bogen
President
Araignee Interactive
edmund@araignee.com

Dear Mr. Bogen:

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You're to be commended on your restraint. You're targeting e-mail to your client rather than carpet-bombing half the Internet. Unfortunately, the big spammers have been harder on such decent marketers as you, and you'll notice from my next correspondence.

Subj: "Morality Tale"**Date:** 96-11-01 13:49:13 EST**From:** rbeckham@egallery.com

Since we first went on-line in April, 1994 we have steadily built up an internet e-mailing list of almost 2,000 people who have contacted us to inquire about twice a month, we send gallery updates to the individuals on this list. But we people who have requested this service now sometimes react strongly to our forgetting that they requested it in the first place. So we find that even though means of communication in a responsible way, the increasingly ubiquitous "spam" threatening to spoil it for everyone.

We do not have the magic bullet answer to this question; we would hope that government regulation is NOT the answer. Perhaps part of the solution will be the equivalent of the on-line Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau, the industry will regulate itself.

Robert Beckham
The Electric Gallery
<http://www.egallery.com>

Dear Mr. Beckham:

I really appreciate your thoughtfulness. The problem of self-regulation, of course, persuasion will never succeed against spammers, and unilateral action by the CompuServe will never stop a determined spammer. I do wonder, though, whether service providers could come together in the kind of forum you describe with creating a set of standards that will pinch junk e-mail. Let's you and I keep talking about collective action.

Subj: Spam Sandwiches**Date:** 96-11-01 13:05:59 EST**From:** JLACHANCE@starlightint.com

I have mixed feelings about junk e-mail. To me, it seems like a great way to do people get so enraged about spam? Millions of direct mail pieces are delivered everyday, why should e-mail be any different? Why is e-mail considered so much more appear any more personal than the good old mail box to me!

James Lachance

Dear Mr. Lachance:

There are some very big differences between your electronic mailbox and yours. For starters, there is no practical economic limit to the amount of spam a mail junk mailer is restrained by the cost of paper and postage, and must therefore list. For another, it costs you nothing to throw away junk mail, but in order to delete spam, you have to open it or click it gone, all while incurring access charges. millions and millions of junk e-mails flying around chew up bandwidth for more than that, it's fine!

Subj: Spamicide

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Date: 96-11-01 16:13:28 EST
From: JPESQUIRE@aol.com

I read with interest your article on the "Spammer Slammer." My solution is more elegant, I think. I highlight the entire body of the offending Spam, and then hit Reply 5-10 times. What results is 5-10 "Return To Sender" spams. The penalty is perfectly fit to the crime, because the size of my avenging spam is directly related to the offending spam I receive.

John Petruna

Dear Mr. Petruna:

Just one problem: Some spammers -- the one I wrote about, in any case -- never receive any of the reply mail you send. They are working through Internet service providers with massive servers that either do not accept mail, automatically delete it or, worst of all, send it back to you. Maybe your tactics works against some spammers -- but not, I suspect, against many of them.

Subj: Spamming
Date: 96-11-01 10:56:50 EST
From: 75450.3705@CompuServe.COM

I've been a long time user of e-mail -- I first logged onto CompuServe in 1982! As a result, my e-mail address seems to be on every list that exists. I usually receive about four to eight junk e-mails every day. For a while, I would go ahead and download them, checking for instructions on how to be removed from the list. I would send out a standard text I'd written up, and hope I got removed from the list.

It seemed to make no difference -- I still received the same number of junk e-mails. Out of the hundred or so REMOVES I sent out, only one person responded that he'd gotten my name from a list and berated.

Until Congress extends the junk fax law to encompass e-mail, we'll all be subject to the spammers.

Matt Hart
Programmer/Systems Analyst
Tax & Accounting Software Corp.
Tulsa, OK

Dear Mr. Hart:

I respectfully disagree. I hate to see the country take a single step down the slippery slope of regulating the content of the Internet (except as existing criminal laws may apply). Maybe it will come to that, but I surely hope not.

Subj: Spam-O-Rama
Date: 96-11-01 11:37:17 EST
From: xxxxxxxx@uswnvg.com

How to Cook Spam:

• This may seem simplistic, don't read spam. Don't reply to it, flame it, or otherwise waste your time. Delete it. Dispatch it to that great gelatinous-substance repository in the ether. When you give a cretin a piece of your mind, you have one less piece to work with. Live by the maxims, "Unread, Good as Dead," and "Deleted is Defeated."

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- Don't fill out silly marketing surveys in return for worthless Web gewgaws. Someone got your e-mail address from somewhere. If you're dealing with an unknown entity, link out before the critical identification can occur. If you enthusiastically fork over the electronic equivalent of your street address for that free gift, chat session, or wowie-zowie software, don't act surprised when Satan comes scratching at your digital door.
- If you must, absolutely must, give out your cherished address, maintain more than one: a sacrosanct one where you actually dwell, and a second, shady one where you would hold your assignations with your modem-mistress, if you had one. Give this one out freely to everyone you don't care to hear from, then just let the spam pile up on that old hard drive you had lying around. Clean it out once a year or so.
- If you receive an offer you can't refuse, pluck out thine eye, or alternatively, unplug thy connection. Do not, upon thy immortal virtual soul, reply. That way lies madness.
- If someone with a Republican frame of mind offers a governmental solution regulating, limiting, defining, or taxing spam, gently point out the section of the Republican Pledge that says, "Mind Your Own Beeswax."


P.S. If you publish my e-mail address, I will cheerfully deliver yours to purveyors of toenail-fungus eradicators everywhere.


Michael Daviduke
Instructional Course Developer
AirTouch Cellular Training & Development

Dear Mr. Daviduke:

You have a genius for this subject, obviously. And yes, since you requested so politely, I fudged the first half of your electronic return address above. As for me, the spammers, alas, already have my number!

See you next week.

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